THE ORTHODOX WORD

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Elder Zosima, Basiliscus' spiritual son

From this day, from this hour,
from this minute, let us strive
to love God above all,
and fulfill His holy will.

THE ORTHODOX WORD

For the Mission of True Orthodox Christianity

Established with the blessing of His Eminence the late *John (Maximovitch)*, Archbishop of Western America and San Francisco, Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia.

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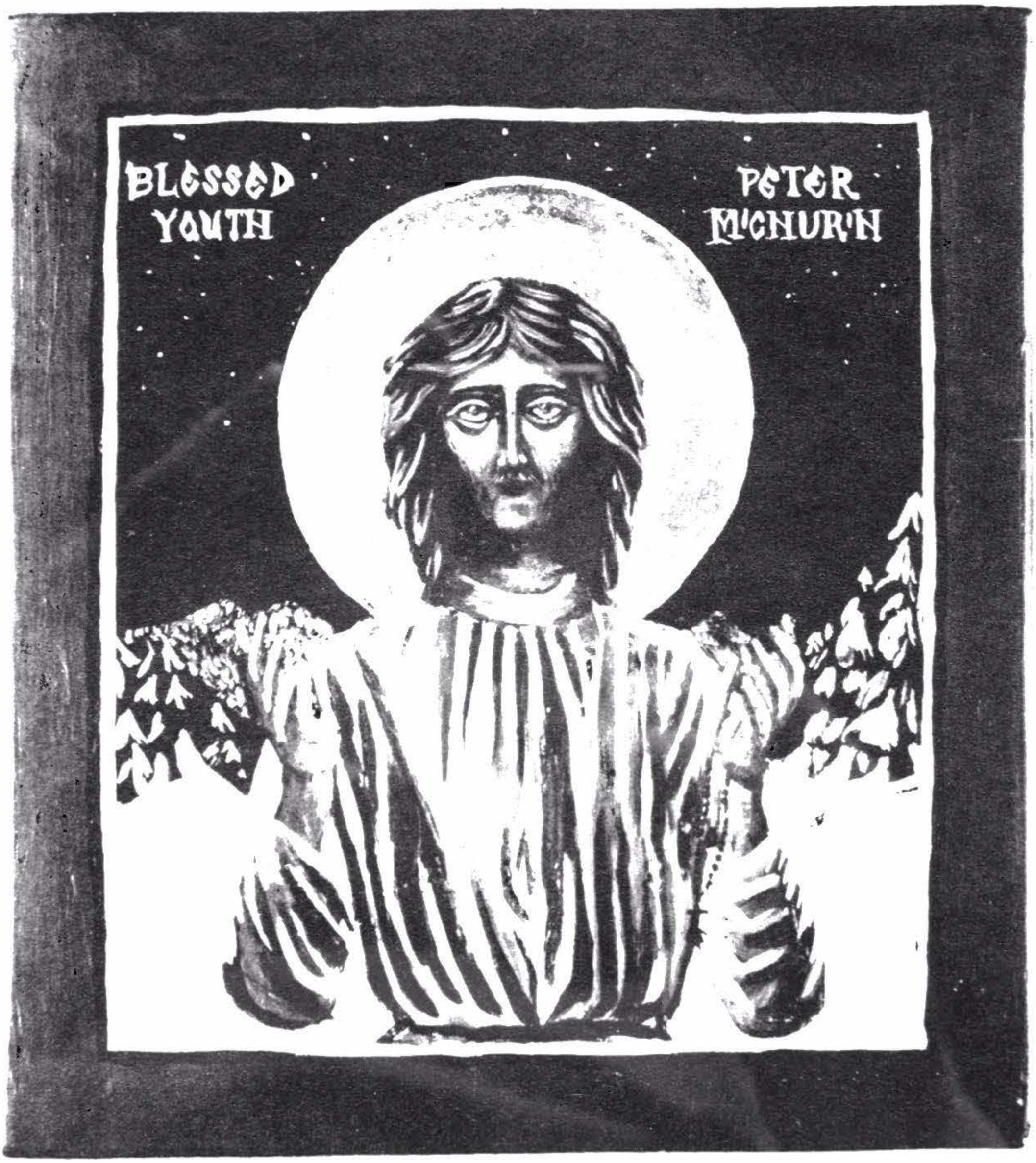
BLESSED
YOUTH
PETER
MICHURIN

Righteous Youth
PETER MICHURIN

— His life and ascetic labors in the Siberian wilderness —

by Elder Zosima Verkhovsky

Glory be to God! There always has been and there still remains hope for those who desire salvation. Presently, in these last times, the grace of the Holy Spirit has also manifested itself unto us. As a vine planted in the unfertile soil of the Siberian land, this youth, Peter, was born to the nobles Alexis and his wife Dominica—residents of the Kuznetsk okrug (Sarchumsk forepost) in the Tomsk province. Receiving a good upbringing in the home of his parents, he first entered the military service and later dedicated himself entirely to serving the Lord God in the monastic life, so as to stand as an animate candle before God, as a joy and triumph to the Angels and to all who have pleased God.

Being twenty years of age, he had fulfilled all of God's commandments. Such a servant is indeed pleasing to Our Lord Jesus Christ, far more pleasing in fact than all material gifts offered to Him in church, even though He is well pleased by these as well. Although the Lord knows how to save those who desire to be saved, life in the world is as far removed from the pure monastic life as are the heavens from the earth. To this life Christ invites all by saying, ". . . go sell which thou hast, and give to the poor, . . . and come follow me." (Matthew 19:21). In other words, we are called to lead an angelic life of chastity so as to be vouchsafed to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit in the same measure as it was granted to this youth, Peter.

However, few pay heed to these words of Christ and few indeed are they that become enflamed with living faith in and love for our Saviour Christ. Our eyes have been blinded by the vanity of our age. Our affliction is worse than that of infants born blind, even though we ourselves see and

hear of many glorious Saints who served God in the monastic order. Oh, what a great joy it is to follow in Christ's footsteps and to order one's life in accordance with His will and, after death, to stand by His side beholding the unutterable glory and jubilation unto the endless ages. As Christ Himself said, "I desire that they (my servants) . . . be with me where I am." (John 17:24).

Oh, what an immeasurable and all-surpassing honour it is to serve Christ! Thus the only one of a great multitude of people in his area, this youth Peter chose this honor for himself. Obeying the summoning words of Christ, he directed his life towards pleasing Him.

Just as our Lord Jesus Christ was obedient to His Father even unto the point of death; just as He fulfilled His Father's will and humbled himself in limitless ignominy, leaving the Heavens and all the riches thereof to dwell upon the earth in poverty, so did the blessed youth Peter likewise become enflamed with zeal to imitate the Holy Fathers, coming to love Christ alone. Just as the Apostle Paul, he accounted all as rubbish for the sake of Christ. Leaving his loving relatives, father, mother, brothers, sisters and friends, as well as all earthly things sweet and wonderful that enchain the people of this world, he departed for the desert regions and settled there, as St. Hilarion said, "Go and embrace the desert life as you would your beloved mother. Your mother raised you on milk, the dessert will teach you to love God with all your heart and will allow you to drink deep of spiritual wisdom, with which you will succeed in leading your life in the direst poverty and in painful ascetic struggles."

Upon first having decided to leave the world, while still employed in the military service, Peter gave up meat and was satisfied with fast foods alone. Refusing to satisfy his thirst, he would at times spend entire days without food. When preparing to receive the Holy Mysteries, he would eat nothing for five days, overmastering himself by offering as an oblation within his heart the prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me a sinner."

He read holy books as well, with great concentration and faith. He was so simple of heart and friendly towards all, that his neighbors and all members of his household loved him for his truthful character and honest relationship with everyone.

Seeing in him such striving for God, his parents did not forbid him to leave them in order to undertake the monastic life and to join the desert dwellers.

He received his discharge from the military with great joy. Demanding nothing of his share of the estate, and taking nothing along with him, he departed to join the desert dwellers as a true pauper. Soon thereafter he entrusted himself to one of the elders by the name of Basilisk, ready to perform any obedience with unquestioning love and faith. From then on he laid aside once and for all every concern for and all thoughts of whatsoever is deemed necessary for (this earthly) life. He placed all his trust in God and in his elder. He began to live with his elder, fulfilling all his instructions most dilligently, "daily advancing in ascetic struggles and becoming kindled with love for God." (no ref.).

With his elder's blessing, he began to decrease his intake of food and drink, abstaining from all sweet foods, especially those which *attracted* him. He warded of temptations therefrom and became so steadfast in this habitual abstinence, that he no longer fell victim to this nature of temptation. He avoided excessive sleep, dressed in ragged and sloppy clothing, voluntarily submitted himself to perform any obedience. However, he never did anything of his own volition but acted only after having asked permission and with full sincerity. He trained himself to be satisfied by only one pound, (¾ litre) and sometimes less, of the 3 or 4 pounds afforded him by his regular diet which consisted of bread that he usually took plain, without salt or jam, at about three in the afternoon or near evening, softening it with a bit of water, or absolutely dry. He often tormented himself unto exhaustion with thirst in the extreme heat of summer. However, he did not do this on the basis of his own ideas or self-will, but rather with the elder's blessing. He abandoned entirely the habit of sleeping on a bed; instead, during his entire stay in the desert he would sit immersed in a tender slumber of contrition and would thus obtain his rest. For this reason, he suffered from swelling in his legs, which he ignored.

Driven by heartfelt love for all the brethren, his cohabitants in the desert, he eagerly volunteered his help and was willing to perform any obedience.

Beholding both the love for God that was evergrowing within him and the yearning of heart for the Lord Jesus, the elder bade him to adhere more to the silent ascetic labors of prostrations and prayer. Furthermore, the elder revealed to the youth the inward activity of the prayer of the heart, instructing him on how to begin this practice.

For his guileless heart and for his love for Him, the Lord granted Peter purity of prayer, consoling and sweetening his soul and entire inner

being to such an extent that at times, he was seen to move and tremble, as if in ecstasy. So consumed was he by love for God due to the turbulent boiling of the sweetness of grace throughout his entire body which he was unable to endure and conceal that, as it happened, he would begin to call out and cry to God in a loud voice warmly and contritely thanking Him for such mercy (to him). Sometimes he sensed a fragrance within and about himself that surpassed all perfumes and spices in sweetness.

It would be impossible to describe all of the fruits of God's grace that blossomed within his heart. The elder would ask him why he calls out and sobs so loudly when overcome by prayer saying, "We have been told to pray in secret, for will not our Heavenly Father who sees that which is in secret reward us openly?" To this, with pure-hearted candor, Peter would humbly answer, "Forgive me father! I cannot refrain from crying out, for with my spiritual eyes I behold how my Master and Lord Christ suffers innocently and is tormented by the Jews. I see as it were, His most holy Body beaten and torn into bloody tatters. His life-giving blood flows in streams. This I cannot endure, forgive me father."

At times, from other similar spiritual impressions which evoked unbearable feelings within him, he would be wholly transformed into love and would pour his heart out in prayers of gratitude to God.

It would be impossible to justly praise and relate his submissiveness and obedience. Always asking (the elder's) blessing, he did everything willingly and fervently, without doubts or excuses. He applied his full effort in everything that he did and upon first being asked. He was ready to surrender himself unto anything lovingly and with a cheerful countenance: he came to hate with perfect hatred all self-mindedness, self-indulgence, self-gratification, and selfwill. He mortified his own will and desires and cast them away from himself. He was never seen to be upset or to murmur about anything whatsoever. He was not only grateful and content with the little afforded him but considered himself unworthy of even this. He always craved the worst and most loathsome for himself. He did everything himself lest his elder have to work.

With his spirit thus aflame, he became so attached to the elder and felt such purehearted love for him and had such great faith in him such as are rarely heard of in these times. There have been many great novices. Much is written in the book of St. John Climacus concerning novices advanced in virtue. However, these were guided by great Fathers. This youth Peter, on the other hand, never even saw a holy monastery nor had

he ever heard the instructions of the great and wise Fathers. Rather, he became attached to a simple elder who for his simplicity firmly refused to be his spiritual father in the full sense of the word. In no way would the elder yield to his (Peter's) pleas to be subjected to the same conditions of obedience as are required to be a true novice. Rather, he lived with him as with a spiritual brother. However, Peter submitted entirely to his elder and did everything the latter would say. Peter would say to his elder: "Even though you refuse, I have nevertheless entrusted my whole life into your hands and no longer have a will of my own. Forgive me father but I so love you and have such faith in you that it is enough for my salvation but to live with you. Even had a wonder-worker turned up somewhere nearby, I would not have exchanged you for him. From the very beginning, my soul benefitted greatly through you, and was from that time onwards pierced with love for you. Forgive me father, but I cannot refrain from kissing your hands and feet. Nor can I refrain from bowing down before all the brethren that live with us for my whole soul is kindled with love for them in Christ. What shall I offer God in gratitude for having vouchsafed me to serve Him by living with you and embracing you?

Many times the elder forbade him to undertake a labor which surpassed his strength. Knowing his (own) ignorance, the elder considered himself unworthy of such honor and respect. To this Peter would answer, "Forgive me father, I cannot express how much I love you! Yea, were it possible, I would contain (settle) the whole of you with me. I wish to die for you!" Such was the strength of his love and respect for the elder. Moreover, he was kindled with sincere love and respect towards all. He was friendly, filled with pious respect, and he always belittled and reproached himself and always chose to perform the most difficult tasks. He strove to serve everyone and dwelt with all in perpetual unanimity. He planned to go into the depths of the wilderness after his elder's death for he felt himself ever-burning with the desire to imitate great fathers such as St. Mark of Thrace and others who lived their life in silence and seclusion.

When sitting in silence engaged in an activity of one sort or another, especially when sitting immersed in attending to the flow of inner prayer, he felt as it were inscribed upon him the words of Christ, "Mary hath chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:42). From such feelings, the desire for the inner desert life was kindled even more within him and he longed to sit like Mary at the feet of the Lord.

Who then would not marvel at his ascetic life, his great patience, and the grace-given spiritual sensations in his heart? At times he so overwhelmed by divine love that he was unable to perform (either with the brethren or alone) an obedience that had been entrusted to him and which he wholeheartedly strove to fulfill. The love of Christ the Lord which burned ever-brighter within him impressed God's goodness, mercy, and love of mankind vividly upon him, not in imaginations, phantoms, images, thoughts or opinions, but rather through a living impression of these upon his heart. Thus fed and illumined spiritually, he often seemed to be in ecstasy as it were and in a joyous rapture. So filled was he with tender feelings of contrition (umileniye) that he would forget altogether about the obedience he was given to perform.

He would be unwillingly transfigured and would be submerged in contemplation of the inner prayer which unutterably sweetened and consoled him. Thus, in heart, he would feel himself wondrously raised entirely up to God. In this state, no longer able to restrain himself, he would weep openly before all: his tears would flow profusely and he would be unable to carry out the job assigned to him.

He performed anything entrusted to him, even the most difficult tasks with good cheer and ferver, exerting a great effort to drive and to force himself. Even if, through performing such a task he would become utterly exhausted, affording himself no pity, he would ignore his exhaustion and finish his work.

From severe fasting and constant abstinence, from suffering great thirst, lack of sleep, and all-night vigils, his entire body wilted and was so dehydrated that his bones were covered by skin alone as if he were a living corpse. He was of a pale and dry countenance; his lips were caked shut from thirst and his eyes were hollow, deep in their sockets; his face and entire body were unkempt and unwashed. From long vigils of standing at prayer, his legs were swollen. Exhausted and contracted, his stomach seemed empty and sucked up into his chest cavity for only his ribs protruded therefrom. From his rule of prostrations, the skin on his hands, knees, and face, wore coarse. On the whole, he was weak in health and in body both from external fasting and (even more so) due to the incessant and consuming flame of boundless love for God, his elder, and the brethren.

He had the gift of giving sound advice. Even while still in the world, he would be instructive: he spoke for the edification of many and even urged young women and widows to live chastely and even to leave the world. When he had already settled with the desert brethren

he also exhorted all to struggle in the labors of fasting and inner prayer, not so much by his friendly conversation as by the example of his life and virtues of sobriety, humility, simplicity of heart (in relations with others), true love and a silent life. For all knew most certainly that he was struggling in labors which exceeded his natural strength. Often, leaving his cell, he would stand entire nights beneath the open sky. Once he decided to vow to test himself and to see whether or not he could bravely stand still with his arms raised to the heavens (all night) in emulation of the young virgin Eupraxia and others who stood thus in prayer. And so, one night, according to the vow he had made, he left his cell to put himself to the test. Standing in an open spot, he raised his hands heavenwards intending to remain standing this way until the morning. By God's providence a bitter frost struck that night. Raised upwards, his arms were exposed and became stiff from the extreme cold and began to ache severely. Reluctant, however, to abandon the prayer which of itself flowed through his heart (samodvizhno), he reasoned thus with himself: "If I show impatience in my first trial before God, how then shall I be worthy to receive His love and mercy?" And so he began to cry out to the Lord in a tearful entreaty. Soon thereafter, he felt the prayer in his heart intensify gradually, flowing ever so sweetly. Suddenly he was overcome by a great surge of grace (of inner prayer) which set the heart within him aboil as water over a fire. At that moment a flood of warmth as it were rushed throughout all members of his body: into his hands, feet, face, and all other parts. Thus, from the action of grace, he was warmed throughout his whole body and the pain from the cold passed away without having damaged his arms in the least. He then remembered the words of the prophet (David): "My heart grew hot within me and in my meditation (of God) a fire was kindled" (Ps. 38:4). Thus with God's help he stood this way until the morning without fatigue.

Peter related all that he experienced to the elder, often saying with full sincerity that, rather than seeming long and tiresome, such all-night vigils (standing) seemed as it were, insufficient and that he would come away reluctantly and unfulfilled when he would leave his place of vigil in the morning.

He acquired the gift of prayer to such an extent, that it seemed to root in his heart flowing therefrom throughout his entire being as he later related himself: "I never cease praying and am never without prayer. Even when my mind forgets (about prayer) as for instance when I doze

off or am asleep, the prayer continues by itself. Upon waking, I feel it moving (acting) within my heart. It never ceases. . . . Just as one greets and accompanies a beloved friend," he would say, "it (prayer) embraces the whole of me, comforting me day and night. Whether I am doing something such as eating. drinking, talking with someone, or concentrating on something, the prayer is ever with me and deep within myself the words thereof vividly etched upon my heart, 'Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me a sinner.' Even when I am attending to the reading of psalms and other edifying writings, the prayer does not cease to flow within my heart. To the contrary, it often interferes with my efforts to listen attentively to the reading and chanting for it steadily draws me within myself to attend to the prayer of my heart." Basilisk marvelled greatly at the grace Peter had received from God. He rejoiced at the youth's God-pleasing ascetic labors which he zealously undertook and endured for the sake of Christ.

Along with prayer, Peter had the gift of tears. Warm, joyous tears came gently, sometimes in small drops sometimes flowing in great streams and other times coming forth unreservedly like a hailstorm accompanied by intense emotion.

In the same way, the action of prayer within him was not uniform: sometimes it was quiet or moderate, and other times strong. However, even the faintest prayer was accompanied by a certain feeling of sweetness. His head would bob and tremble from the sensation of inward prayer and thus it was known how strong and constant this prayer within him actually was.

When the prayerful spirit would ascend to its highest summit, like an earthly vessel of water over material fire, Peter would boil as it were, in turmoil. His heart within him dartd to and fro, as if in pain, it was tormented within itself without any effort on his part. When overcome by a great surge of prayer, he felt as one who is driven and sits and observes as he travels. He would contemplate in spirit the incomprehensible and unutterable panorama which is revealed by prayer of the heart and which fills one with profound joy in which the soul is overwhelmed with love for God. He would remain thus kindled (so as to be) unable to do anything (but pray): neither to sing chants, nor perform his rule of prostrations, nor read holy books, nor go anywhere, nor think about anything whatsoever. In spirit, he was wholly immersed in God, enraptured by such grace. Within him his heart would boil sweetly as if it were over a fire and from the unbearable sensations, his whole body would sway like a young tree, or flutter like a leaf in the wind.

It would be impossible to relate all the manifestations of grace within him. When his spirit would ascend to a state of ecstasy. unable to bear the sweetness of this spiritual joy, he would cry out and moan in a moving voice, weeping inconsolably as if mourning over the corpse of a loved one; other times he would simply cry out, "What shall I render unto Thee for all that Thou hast rendered unto me (Ps. 115:3) and for all the good things that Thou hast revealed to me in my heart?" Observing him, the elder always marvelled greatly.

God-beloved Peter would ask his elder from whence these sweet sensations and fragrances came to him. In answer to this question, the elder would say, "We must seek to understand God's economy, searching such things out and striving to know them. Above all we must fear deception which causes one to fall into pride and to consider oneself a saint, both of which deprive one of God's help." The elder also told him, "Neither reject (such sensations) nor accept; that is, if you believe that you are granted such sweetness and fragrances only by the mercy of God, considering yourself unworthy; if your humility, patience, and passionlessness towards everything increase, and if you are overcome by love for God and all people, then it is indeed right to regard such gifts as granted by God's providence that is inspiring you to show greater gratitude and to perform yet greater God-pleasing labors. However, if you do not observe such saving fruits from the sweetness and fragrances but rather indulge in the sweetness of self-admiration, then you should know that their source is the enemy."

Once the elder had to leave Peter behind to visit another elder for a few days. We then beheld a wondrous sight indeed: his (Peter's) heart languished and suffered so that he knew not how to help himself. Although the elder and others instructed him, it was impossible to stop the flow of bitter tears which were an expression of his love for the elder. He bowed to him frequently, falling to the earth. He repeatedly kissed the elder's hands and feet forcibly, thus accompanying him for a great distance, sobbing along the way. And when the elder gave him the final blessing and farewell kiss, bidding him to return, then, regardless of how insensitive, anyone would have been pierced with pity looking at him. He appeared as one struck by a drastic misfortune: barely able to let the elder go his way, Peter stood sobbing for a long time, asking for the elder's prayers and blessing. After weeping and calling out after him, he finally turned back and returned walking quietly, constantly looking back at the elder and prostrating himself in the latter's direction even though the elder, for his part, did not look back.

Thus as the elder disappeared from sight, Peter returned home and spent the entire time of his separation (from Basilisk) in sorrow as if his soul sensed its imminent separation from the elder in this world.

When we brought him the old icon of the Mother of God with which his parents had blessed him and which we had restored, his soul was filled with such joy as would be impossible to describe; how he was consoled! His entire countenance changed and he venerated the holy icon with tears of joy, prostrating himself before it and kissing it. He thanked the elder who brought it with many joyous words, falling to the ground before him. From this we saw his great love for us and his great faith in the Mother of God.

Some time thereafter, Peter revealed to the elder his desire to endure a forty-day fast for the sake of God and out of gratitude for having vouchsafed him to lead the desert life. However, the elder did not consent to this and said, "My beloved brother, I do not know whether this desire proceeds from God or not. I dare not refuse you or ridicule your intention, seeing as you are so consumed by love for God. You have endured a five-day fast many times without murmuring; however, without a revelation from God I dare not give you my blessing to fast for forty days. Furthermore, due to my unworthiness, I even fear to entreat God to reveal this to me, nor do I even consider this necessary. You yourself did not receive such a revelation but are driven with such fervor to undertake this fast solely by your love for God and gratitude towards Him. Subject yourself to a test and learn whether or not this desire is indeed God-inspirerd: During the upcoming fast, abstain from food for ten days. If this is in accordance with God's will, then He shall help you. The following fast (Great Lent) you may then decide to fast for twenty days, then you may fast as you wish, for forty days.

When the time of Great Lent approached, the elder blessed Peter to fast for ten days, himself leaving to complete some necessary business with another elder. Remaining alone, Peter began to fast as the elder had blessed (him to do) and thought to himself, "While I still have strength and am not yet exhausted. let me go and chop some wood." When he began to chop however, he missed and struck his leg, inflicting a severe wound. Loosing a great deal of blood along the way, Peter was barely able to reach his cell. Having returned and seeing the youth in such trouble, the elder felt very sorry for him since he continued to fast having suffered so great a loss of blood.

In this state of illness and exhaustion, Peter did not lay his desire aside, but spent ten days without food. At the end of his ten-day fast he said to the elder, "What wondrous things Christ does for me! What shall I offer to Him in return?" He then said, "Bless me father to spend this night in prayer to God out of gratitude towards Him." The elder answered, "If you can, do so and God shall help you; however, guard (protect) your leg."

Choosing rather to follow the words of Christ, "He that loveth himself more than me is not worthy of me" (See Matthew 10:37) and neglecting his leg he stood on both legs the whole night until the elder summoned him to attend mattins. After the service he went to work in the vegetable garden and did not give himself even the slightest rest or consolation so much so that he even began to moan. Later he was already unable even to leave his cell.

A day before his death, the illness subsided unexpectedly, and Peter slept peacefully that night. Rising from sleep in the morning he could stand firmly upon both legs and looked lovingly and contritely at the elder. The latter then said to him, "Spare your leg my beloved." Quietly smiling, Peter said "I can stand firmly on both (legs)." And began to pace about the cell. Having conversed a bit he said, "I could use something to drink." The elder objected, "You can, but wait awhile. We are expecting a priest; he will give you communion."

Seeing such an unexpected reversal in Peter's illness the elder marvelled and praised God who ressurects the dead. Soon thereafter Peter's face changed color and he turned directly towards the east, gazing to his right pleasantly and to his left with anger. Watching him, the elder was amazed at this. Gazing again quickly heavenward, Peter fell to his knees and bowed his head, resting it upon the table as if he had dozed off. Seeing this, the elder thought that he had fallen asleep. Awhile later the elder began to wake him, but Peter had already passed on to eternal rest from the pain and grief of this age, reaching endless repose where, with all the saints, he supremely exalts the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the one God above all, Who is worshipped in the Trinity and to Whom may there be honor, praise, and thanksgiving from us sinners, both now and ever and unto the endless ages, Amen.

Concerning Peter Michurin, the elder Basilisk testifies thus. "Although I have travelled much with my spiritual brother (Zosima of Verkhovsk), yet nowhere did we encounter a slave of God so severely ascetic and humble in wisdom as was this youth Peter."

Peter Michurin died in Siberia several years before his elder Basilisk, who died in 1824, also in Siberia.

The author of this life, the monk Zosima and disciple of Basilisk died in September of 1833 in deep old age. Zosima was himself a witness of Peter's ascetic labors.

Righteous youth Peter is commemorated on October 4th (1820)

VITA PATRUM

(THE LIFE OF THE FATHERS)

by SAINT GREGORY OF TOURS

CHAPTER XIII

SAINT LUPICINUS
LAY RECLUSE OF THE AUVERGNE

The athletes of Christ and those who triumph over the world, desirous of losing this fleeting life, have wished to arrive at this life which abides in perpetual joy, where is heard no sighing and which is terminated by no end, whose light never goes out and whose serenity will be obscured by no cloud of gloom. For this reason they always counted as nothing the offenses and sorrows of the present life, knowing well that for the few torments they suffered they will obtain great joys later. That is why whoever aspires to take part in this combat should not be frightened by any terror, should not be turned aside by any difficulty, should not be discouraged by any sorrow in order to be worthy to be admitted to the enjoyment of eternal happiness with God's elect. Such has been the path of the holy man whose life is written and read here.

1. Lupicinus, a man of great sanctity and very strong in the works of God, had originally been given over to seeking alms in the houses of the devout and would give to those in similar circumstances what he was able to acquire by this means. When he reached middle age he came to the village of Berberens, which is now called Lipidiaco. There he found old walls in which he shut himself up, and he withdrew from the sight of all men, receiving through a small window a little bread and water, which

would sometimes last him three days, even though he was given very little. The water was brought in by a little channel, and as for his small window, it was shut by a rag. Both openings had been so concealed that it was not possible for anyone to see his blessed face.

Since he took delight in this place, day and night singing psalms in praise of God, he sought a means of afflicting his body more, for he remembered these words of the Apostle: "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). The whole day he carried on his neck, while he was chanting the praises of God in his cell, a huge stone which two men could scarcely move. At night, to mortify himself the more, he had fixed on the cane which he carried two thorns with the points turned out and which he would place under his chin in order to hinder his sleep.

Finally, toward the end of his life, his chest was caved in by the weight of the rock he carried, and he began to spit blood on the walls around him. But very often during the night, devout men would draw near his cell secretly and there heard as if there were the voices of several persons who were singing psalms, and many of the infirm—and especially those tormented by fever of foul pustules—were healed simply by having been touched by his hand or by having received his blessing with the saving sign of the Cross.

2. When he was bent over with old age, he called his servant and said to him, "The time is past for hiding matters, and the time has come to tell them. So know that in three days I will be delivered from this world. Now call all the faithful, my brothers and my sons, to come visit us. I want to bid them farewell." On the third day his brethren came in crowds to his door; he opened it, and when he had greeted and embraced them all, he made his prayer to the Lord, saying, "I give Thee thanks, O Lord Jesus Christ, Who hast ordered my deliverance from all the stumbling-blocks of this world, and Who hast so vouchsafed to preserve me in this world from such things, that the author of all crimes has found nothing of his."

And turning toward the people, he said, "I beg you, beloved, to magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together (Ps. 33:3). For it is He Who has raised me up from the mire; Who has drawn me from the work of darkness and made me a participant of the joy of His friends;

Who sent me His Angel to call me from this earthly dwelling and promised to lead me to eternal rest, in order that, having become a fellow of those whom He honors with His friendship, I will also be worthy to be admitted to His Kingdom."

O blessed man who was worthy to be consoled in this body to the point of knowing those things which will be enjoyed in Heaven before leaving this world, and who could obtain here below the Divine power which David so often asked: "Make known to me, O Lord, my end, and the number of my days, so that I may know what is lacking to me" (Ps. 38:5). Finally, having lain upon the ground, he gave up to the Lord his soul which was sighing after Heaven. Then all fell prostrate and shed tears. They strove some to kiss his feet, some to remove some scrap from his clothing, others in rivalry to gather from the wall the blessed blood which he had spat, and each called himself unfortunate if he withdrew without being able to carry away from him some relics. The wall is still witness today of what we have just said, for it presents as many hollows as it merited receiving the spittle spat from the blessed one's mouth. It was the same with the channel through which the holy man drew the water necessary for his use: by kissing it with faith they drew health from it. I myself have seen many who, having dug out the spittings from that sanctified mouth, have been honored with receiving from it healing of various infirmities.

3. When the Saint was dead, as we have said, there was a certain respectable lady, who, after having had the body washed and reclothed in fitting garments, wished to convey it to the village of Trezelle; but the people of Lipidiaco were opposed to it, saying, "It is our land which nourished him—his body belongs to us." But the lady replied, "If you rely upon the needs of his life in order to oppose me, I also often sent him wheat and barley, which he ate himself or gave to others." The others replied, "He went out from among us, he drank the water from our river, and he mounted up to Heaven from the earth where we are. Is it right, then, that you who come from another country tear him from our hands? Now know that not one of us will allow it: he will be buried here." The lady answered: "You wish to determine his origin and his race? He came from foreign lands. You speak of the waters of your river? They contributed less to quenching his thirst than the waters of Heaven."

And, after they had bandied about such words, the inhabitants of Lipidiaco dug a grave and were intending to bury the Saint's body when the lady called for help, put the peasants to flight, and took up the holy body by force and then had it conveyed in a coffin to the village of Trezelle, after having set out along the route troops of psalm-singers with crosses, tapers, and fragrant incense. The people, seeing this, repented and sent after the lady to say to her, "We have sinned in resisting you, and we sincerely recognize that the Lord's will is that it be so in this matter. Now we ask you not to be excluded from his funeral but to be admitted to the offices for him." She granted them to follow the procession, and thus both peoples were united and came together to the village of Trezelle, where, after the celebration of the Liturgy, they buried the blessed body with the greatest honor and joy.

In that village the most blessed one often manifested himself in miracles. But in Lipidiaco also he did not neglect to give even after his death many marks of his sanctity, as we have said above; for these two places were protected by the same Saint. And perhaps some unbelievers will try by their barking to refute what we have said. But let them know that I have seen the priest Deodatus, who is in his eighties, who related to me these things just as I have written them, declaring to me on oath that he had blended no falsehood with them.

NOTES

This Saint Lupicinus should not be confused with Saint Lupicinus of Condat (ch. 1). He died on Jan. 24, 500.

Lipidiaco is the present Dompierre-sur-Bebre, northeast of Clermont. Trezelle was a neighboring village.

CHAPTER XIV

SAINT MARTIUS THE ABBOT BLESSED WARRIOR OF CHRIST

The Divine goodness grants us a great benefit when it prepares for us a refuge for the remission of our sins if we forgive the negligence of others, if we are indulgent towards those who have offended us, if we reply to hatred with our belssing, our Lord Jesus Christ having said to us, "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven" (Matt. 5:44-45). Behold the great treasure one amasses when he scorns anger, when he is reconciled with the one who has condemned him, when he forgives the one who has judged him. Contempt for anger makes you a son of God the Father, a co-inheritor with Christ, and establishes you as a dweller in the heavenly Kingdom.

Whence it is manifest that his sins are blotted out who grants in this world the grace of pardon to the one who has offended him. For such is the judgment our Lord has delivered on this matter: "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you (Matt. 6:14). And, when He teaches His humble servants to pray to Him, He says, You shall speak thus to your Father: Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors (Matt. 6:12).

This blessed abbot, Saint Martius, was a person celebrated for his holiness, instructed in Divine letters, and who kept in his heart the good of this judgment, of pardoning with a good heart him who offends you. And not only did he pardon the fault, but he even accompanied the pardon with some present in order never to disgrace the person of the offender. But first let us say some words about his life before speaking of that grace whose benefit he received.

1. Blessed Martius, abbot in the city of Clermont, was, it is said, originally from that territory. From his childhood he led a religious life and dedicated himself wholly to the works of God. Truly, he was sparing in his meals, generous in almsgiving, assiduous in vigils, very devout in his

prayers. He used all his energy in subduing luxury by the bit of abstinence and the combat of frugality, for fear of giving the least hold on himself. Not without reason was he called Martius, he who, with the sword of the Holy Spirit cut off at their birth, in martial triumph, hostile thoughts which swarm in mortal souls. He was not deaf to these exhortations of the epistle which tells us, "Arm yourself with the armor of God and the sword of the Holy Spirit, so that you may be able to set at naught the flaming darts of the devil" (Eph. 6:11, 16, 17).

When he had come to the legal age of majority and shone in the city like a brilliant star, he thought that there was still something lacking to him. He went away some distance, took a pickaxe, and began to hack away at a rocky mountain in which he hollowed out cells and made himself little dwellings. This was in order that, held more tightly by the bond of sobriety, he might offer more easily to God Almighty the incense of his prayers and the whole burnt offerings of his praises on the altar of a pure heart, recalling these words spoken by the Lord in the Gospel: "Enter into your closet, and with the door closed pray to your Father, and your Father Who sees in secret will reward you" (Matt. 6:6). He knew that the Angels would not fail to console him with their visitations, if he withdrew himself from the sight of men. Thus he prepared for himself, in this rock which he had hollowed out of the mountain, the things necessary for a dwelling, making himself in the heart of these grottos—and out of the very rock—a bench and a couch or bed on which to rest his body, fatigued by laborious work. But all these objects were stationary, because they had been cut into the rock. When he wanted to sleep, he would put nothing underneath him except only the habit with which he was clothed, having only that for pad, mattress, and blanket. He possessed for his own only the worship of God, in which he remained constantly. The liberality of devout persons provided him his subsistence.

2. Finally the eternal Lord, Who does not cease to glorify His saints, began to make known to men His servant's worth, pointing out to them in what manner he rendered to the Divinity the worship due Him, when He vouchsafed the Saint the grace of healing illnesses. For he cast out demons from the bodies of the possessed in the name of Jesus Christ and halted the poison of malignant pustules by the sign of the Cross. He also healed tertian and quartan fevers by an infusion of blessed oil and granted

to the people many other benefits by the will of Him Who dispenses all good things.

Attracted by the renown of such a great man, some people began to crowd about him, joyful over being able to be formed by his teaching. What more? He gathered men, formed monks, and made them perfect in the work of God. Indeed, his was great patience, and he armed himself with so much good in order to repulse the shafts hurled against him to harm him, that you would have thought his protected by a true cuirass of kindness.

The monks had a garden full of a large quantity of various vegetables and fruit trees, which was at once pleasing to behold and delightful for its fertility. In the shade of these trees, whose leaves murmered sweetly in the breath of the zephyr, the blessed old man was wont to sit. A bold man without fear of God, tormented by the desires of gluttony, forced the garden hedge and entered by stealth, something the Lord has condemned in the Gospel: "He who does not enter by the door is a thief and a robber" (John 10:1). Now this was during the night, and those things could not be done except during that time, because "everyone who does evil hates the light" (John 3:20). This man, then, after having picked vegetables, onions, garlic, and fruits, went to leave, laden with the burden of his culpable fraud, through the opening by which he had entered. But he could not find the opening anywhere, and overcome by the weight he was carrying and pricked by his conscience, he let forth deep sighs under the burden of this double affliction, leaning against the tree trunks from time to time. He ran round and round the whole garden, and not only did he not find the entrance, but he could not even see any longer the way he had opened under cover of darkness.

Then he was in a double fear: either of falling into the monks' hands or of being taken by the judge. In the midst of these burning thoughts, the night slipped away and the day, which he did not desire, drew nigh. At this time the abbot would use the night for singing Psalms, and he learned, by a revelation from God, I think, what was happening. At daybreak he called the prior of the monastery and said to him, "Run quickly to the garden; an escaped ox has gotten in, but he has done no damage. Approach him, and having given him needful things, let him go, for thus it is written, 'Thou shalt not muzzle a threshing ox' (I Cor. 9:9; Deut. 25:4)."

The prior did not understand what this meant, but he went to carry out the order. The man, seeing him come, threw down the things he had taken, took to flight, and then, plunging his head into the middle of the thorns and brambles, in the manner of swine, tried to get out the same way he had come in. The monk seized him and said to him, "Do not fear, my son, because our elder sent me to lead you out from this place." Then, gathering up all the man had thrown away, the fruits with the vegetables, he put this load on the man's shoulders. Opening the door, he dismissed him saying, "Go in peace, and hereafter do not repeat the base act you have committed."

3. This priest, like a true lamp enlightening the world with a pure light, frequently cast out infirmities by the efficacy of his virtues. A certain Nivardus, for a long time racked with fever and constantly drinking water in order to quench the fire of his illness, became dropsical to the point where his belly and stomach swelled visibly like a bladder. In desperation from such an infirmity, he asked to be taken by cart to the Saint's abode. He was raised from his bed, placed on a cart, and driven to the cell of Saint Martius, humbly begging the priest of God to lay his hands on him. The Saint prostrated himself in prayer before the Lord, turned toward the sick man, and gently rubbing his limbs, gave him back his health in the sight of all. Now, it is said that this swelling with which the body of Nivardus was afflicted disappeared so completely under the Saint's fingers that afterward no trace of this illness remained.

I learned these things from my father, for this Nivardus was bound to him by a close friendship. He even affirmed having seen the Saint and said that when he was still young, about eleven years old, he had some attacks of tertian fever. Then his friends led him to the man of God, who was already old and near the end of his days and who could scarcely see any more. And when he had placed his hand on the boy, he asked, "Who is this, or whose son is he?" They answered, "This boy is your servant Florentius, son of the Senator George." And the Saint said, "May the Lord bless you, my son, and may healing be granted to your weakness." When the boy had kissed his hands and thanked him, he went away healed. Moreover, he affirmed that he no longer felt in his whole life any effect of that sickness.

4. At length, at the age of ninety, covered with the sweat of a good combat, having come to the end of the course of his life and always keeping watch over his faith in God, the Saint went to receive that crown of righteousness which the Lord was to give him on the day of reckoning. Then his body, bathed with great honor and clothed in becoming garments, was buried in the monastery oratory. That his holy tomb has been made famous by the Divine virtues manifested there, there is no need of other witnesses than the crowd of the sick who go there and return home healed immediately. And indeed, the sick who go there from various lands not only find solace, but also most often they feel the shivers of fever which agitate their limbs succeeded by perfect health, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who, having of old called the dead from the tomb, now glorifies by illustrious miracles the tombs of the Saints. To Him may there be glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

NOTES

Saint Martius reposed on April 13, 525. Up to the 18th century his tomb was kept in a chapel in the Abbey of St. Illidius (see ch. 2) in Clermont, but now it is lost.

Christ is Calling You

SEVEN LENTEN MEDITATIONS

Sermons to young people by Father George Calciu-Dumitreasa. Given at the Chapel of the Romanian Orthodox Church Seminary, Bucharest

Translation by Keston College, Kent, England

FIFTH MEDITATION
April 5, 1980

Thou art a priest forever after
the order of Melchisadec.

Hebrews 5:6

PERHAPS YOU HAVE been asking yourself, my young friend, why I have even been addressing you, and by what authority? What right do I have to give this message which is disturbing you and obliging you to face up to disturbing questions? Why have I come to confirm you in your own misunderstood terror and to open up to you certain perspectives which are both new and unexpected? Why do I also break down your fragile balance of defences?

Probably by uncovering for you the purity and innocence which you did not recognize, I have made you even more vulnerable in this wicked world. I have made you more open to suffering, and it is natural that you should ask what is the purpose of suffering. Is it a finality, a blind happening, a fate traced by the stars, a blinding ocean in which you swim without hope of reaching any shore?

I speak to you in the name and authority of Christ and His Church, in the name of the priesthood to which Christ called me, because nothing in this world is an interplay of unconscious, arbitrary happenings. All things stem

from a cause and hold fast towards an end which stands outside this world. The cause is God, the end is God. He is the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and Omega.

But what is this world? What certainty does it offer us, what happiness awaits us at the unknown corners of life, like comfort in misfortune? I will not begin with death, nor life, nor with the beginning nor the end; but with the given: that which happens to us every day.

Have you asked yourself, young person, what is your purpose in the world and whether everything is reduced simply to that? If we were born to be slaves of matter—and this is only a philosophical proposition—then the end of your life is slavery. If your freedom is reduced to need and logic—which in the last analysis is the same thing—then your freedom is slavery. If all our knowledge is reduced to a sterile and never-realized understanding of the laws of matter, our knowledge is slavery. If your love is reduced to the struggle for existence, and our sacrifice is for the perpetuating of the species, then these things too are but slavery. And finally, if all our convictions spring from an imposed, official doctrine, then they too are slavery. And in all this series, young friend, where is the place for your soul?

You sense that there exists, away from all the materialism with which you have been intoxicated, and far from the atheism which has been imposed upon you like a violent ideology, something vaster, more authentic and yet closer to you personally than all that which suffocates you in this materialist bath. Your spirit within you propels you towards that "something", as towards a world only envisioned and suspected.

This world, like the blue sky glistening in the sun, sees its own image through the grid of prohibitions which this society raises up to you.

Know, friend, that neither an atheist ideology, nor the materialist order, no matter how authoritatively it might be imposed upon you, is in any state to raise up an absolutely impregnable wall against you and the spiritual world. The soul cannot be made prisoner. This is a law

which the materialists refuse to recognize at their own peril. *On the spiritual level there is no captivity without hope.*

Your teachers speak to you of atheism and secretly go to church. Behold a crack through which the golden light of the spiritual dimension reaches you. Your ideological leaders thunder and lighten against religion, uttering the most foul curses, yet at the moment of disaster they make the sign of the cross, asking for God's help—as, for example, during the earthquake of March 4, 1977. Behold another crack through which the soul escapes the suffocating locker which the official ideology builds up by and by. In atheist meetings those obliged to speak condemn those who believe or who were caught in the criminal act of going to church. Yet away from the lying words, far from their false-toned platform proclamations, you discern their fear of being discovered as also having a religious belief. The lie in which they so lamentably swim breaks down once more the wall of your incarceration, and you say as the sweet light breaks through: "Whence this unnatural light? It is a light foreign to this world."

I spoke to you about these things in my previous four sermons, I will continue to speak further about them—for I am a priest of Christ. God has discovered us through the sacramental love of His works, and Jesus has commanded me to make it known to you so that you will not say further: "I did not know it."

I speak to you that you might know that you can fly, and that only spiritual flight is truly exalted. The flight of materialism is flight with broken wings. The Church of Christ has come out of the catacombs. She shines blindingly on the soil of this country which is highly esteemed in our hearts.

The Enea Church was destroyed—but who among us, Romanian and Christian, can forget it? A beer hall, a symbol of a concept which considers the Church a plague, will be put in its place. A beerhall—so once more the people

will be happy! Woe to the architect who builds there, binding his name forever with the destruction of something that was a demonstration of the Romanian genius of construction and faith. Woe to the officials who believe that they can win glory and power by destroying a church and building a beerhall. Woe to the concept that considers an Agapia Inn more valuable than the Agapia Monastery. Woe to those who consider that the Romanian Patriarchate is a piece of history which can be placed in a museum, and who have not understood that it has a real life which is always present. It is not a historical relic but a living soul.

Woe to those who bow to force, allowing destruction which will never be accepted by history.

I have said all these things to you because I am a priest. And because we are priests and we listen to the command of God which says that a burning light cannot be hid under a bushel but must shine before all (Matt. 5:15). I have said these things, young friends, that you might judge if it is right before God to listen to men rather than God (Acts 4:19). For He Who gave Himself upon the Cross for the salvation of the world, commanded us not to hide the divine truth. I have said all these things to you that you might understand that through faith we shatter walls and break down the bonds of prejudice and abuse, even if we shall have tribulation in this world (John 16:33).

There is a continual battle between good and evil, between right and wrong, between freedom and captivity of ideas, between purity and corruption. All these battles take place on the one single field of combat—the heart of man. I, the priest of Christ, address this heart; for as Pascal has said: "The heart has its own way of thinking, which reason ignores."

What, then does the priesthood mean? It means to be an enduring witness to human suffering and to take it upon your own shoulders. To be the one who warms the leper at the breast and who gives to the miserable life through the breath from his own mouth. To be a strong

comfort to every unfortunate one, even when you yourself are overwhelmed with weakness. To be a ray of shining light to unhappy hearts when your own eyes long ago ceased to see any light. To carry mountains of suffering on your shoulders, while your own being screams out with the weight of its own suffering.

Your flesh rebels and says: "This is absurd, impossible. Where is such a man, where is the priest you describe so that I may put my own suffering upon him?" Yet nevertheless he exists! From time to time there awakens within us the priest of Christ who, like the Good Samaritan, will kneel down by the side of the man fallen among thieves and, putting him upon his own donkey, will bring him to the Church of Jesus for healing. From time to time the priest of Christ in us forgets ourselves and comforts you, the man of suffering.

Who else could be moved by your suffering? Who else would bear your burden, say words of comfort to you? From whom else would you hear the words of Christ to you today: "Come to me, all who are burdened and heavy ladened."

I have seen you, my young friend, bullied by your elders, mocked and insulted for the simple crime of being young. I spoke to you then as one in weakness and pain, as a sensitive and defenseless being. Then I saw you, to my horror and joy, bow and kiss my hand, humbling yourself in your unexpected gesture which flowed from the depth of your wounds. For you did not kiss my hand, but that of a priest of Christ who brought you comfort.

Because you have overcome death, to which atheist doctrine had condemned you, because you have been exalted above the ruins of fallen materialism through your youth and faith, I speak to you the words which Jesus spoke through the Apostle to the Gentiles. They sound absurd to the prisoner of matter and materialism, to those who substitute beerhalls for churches and indecency for suffering. But to you they will resound full of spiritual meaning and truth.

The preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? (I Cor. 1:18-20).

Where are all these men, my friends? There are none of them left. But you have remained here alive and whole in the Church of Christ, a holy people, won by God, a foundation stone on which the Orthodox spirit of the Romanian people is built. You are its single salvation and preservation through this age.

SIXTH MEDITATION
April 12, 1978

Verily, verily I say unto you, If
a man keep My saying, he shall
never see death.
John 8:51

We will talk today, friends, about death and resurrection. What a dissonance to your ears which know only of death and life! You know nothing, my dear friends, but the logical meaning of affirmations. Forcibly held by the materialist strait-jacket, you know that water flows to the valleys, that fire burns and clouds contain electrical current. But this information is intended to make you sleep easy, with your ears bent to obedience and your senses restricted to what is given to you. The universal remedy is offered to you like a slice of apple pie.

The deans of atheist ideologies have received inspiration which has placed them in possession of absolute truth: the substitution of one glaring error for another only a little less fantastic. The only problem is that each new error is imposed on you as an absolute truth. The attempt to criticize an ideological truth is a dangerous heresy. The official guardians of atheism begin at once to hunt the witch.

The poles of our existence stretch between life and death. That is what every materialist concept states. You, O man, are destined to be born and die as a caprice of nature, or as a simple joke of passion. You have no destiny. You follow the law of necessity and quantity, which through some miracle becomes quality, and you must accept this as the only law governing your life and death.

This means that you are the most unfortunate being on earth, for neither plants nor animals have any consciousness of life and death. But you do. You know that you live, and you especially know that you will die. Your whole life unfolds under the somber perspective of death. If our modern world has not increased at all the chances for life, it has multiplied infinitely the possibilities for death. Civilization and Death, the tragic horsemen of the Apocalypse have been ravaging our planet for centuries. And no angel of resurrection is evident on the horizon. No archangel shakes the heavens with his thunderous voice, commanding the horsemen to cease.

In the material heaven of the atheist, which defines your horizon for you, there are written the funeral words: "Nothing exists but life and death". And after them a striking prohibition: "It is forbidden to believe in the resurrection!"

Friend, what has atheism given you in exchange for its dispossessing you of faith in the resurrection? What holy gift has it given you for taking away from you Jesus the Risen One? To what serene celebration has it called you when it put you to work on Easter and Christmas? What purification and spiritual rest has it outlined for you after

the Christian celebrations were soiled with the dirt of denigration and violent verbal slogans?

At another time, men sought to live out God's time, dimensions stretching out towards infinity; today we speak of "meetings." At another time we reconciled ourselves at Easter to our fellow men with the words of the Paschal hymn: "Let us embrace one another. Let us say 'Brother' to those who hate us. Let us forgive all things for the sake of the Resurrection." Today on Pascha we are issued rustic amusements, with alcoholic orgies which inevitably end up in violence.

You know, friends, that an idea is valid, not through the fact that it exists, but through its positive effects. So judge for yourself, my friend; compare and appreciate. But above all, commit yourself. For you must choose between good and evil; meekness and violence; life and death.

But now I want to take you with me onto another plain. To go on this unexpected flight you must renounce the prejudices which material sense has planted in your mind. You must purify your heart of passions which your educators have cultured within you with such care since your childhood, calling them by shining and virtuous names. You must wipe out faithlessness and atheism; hatred and lack of respect for men; servility and violence; cowardice and arrogance. And thus purified, you will be directed to the great festival of the Resurrection.

You must understand that the Resurrection of Christ is a renewal of the universe. Through your transformation the whole world is changed. At the Lord's Supper, when Jesus announced His approaching sufferings, these suffering words were to assume a mystical and saving value for the whole world. You must understand that suffering leads to death, but death leads to resurrection.

Yet if there be no resurrection, if the only reality is death, then we are more unfortunate than stones. For in seeing things without faith, our life endures but from birth until death, which could be a day, or it could be 70 years;

for from the moment of your birth you are old enough to die. What sense, then, has this short interval in face of the foreverness of death? To die like an animal means, simply and purely, to die. Like a stone loosened from its pile, or a calf struck by the axe of the butcher in the slaughterhouse. Such a death has nothing human in it. It is a nightmare. For beyond it there is no light, only terrible darkness. Human life, in its essence, is a tragedy because of the death and suffering which go with it.

Whether a believer or not, no man can escape that ultimate judgment which momentarily precedes the agony of death and which is the tribunal of our own conscience. Who among us will feel totally innocent at that judgment? Death with its somber absence of perspective terrifies us because absence of faith has weakened us and because, in the general fear which rules the world, death does not appear as liberator but as the supreme terror. For we have dehumanized death by violating the idea of God, and matter itself cannot dominate the spirit except by force.

The greatest and most emphatic atheists of our century, who have both made of matter a god, and of atheism a new mystical way, and have also used every means of persuasion to kill God in you, young friend, are themselves afraid of their own disappearance in an incurable, metaphysical fear. Thus they build monuments to themselves, attaching themselves to their earthly remains with a stupefying devotion. Tragically, they try to substitute their aspirations for eternity with these stones. The drama of their idolized lives ends in a more idolatrous death. They have lived in terror of suffering and have desired a sudden death. Yet death itself is an unbearable suffering because of its uselessness. They were not spared even this ultimate act of solidarity with mankind, namely death.

Indeed Jesus has given us a death without fear, a reconciliation between death and happiness. For He has brought to us the assurance that death is not the end, but a beginning. The beginning of eternal life is life through the resurrection.

To love someone is to say: "You will not die." And you believe what you say. Yet this blind, irrational, inarguable faith is in fact the only fundamental truth which we feel with genuine profundity in our loving. I speak of all loves. The mother, caressing her child, says to him with a faith that carries mountains: "You will not die." And she believes it. The beloved who buries a dear one with words of passion which melt the coffin, says in effect: "You will not die," and she believes it.

Man's darkened history knows one moment of sunshine, which since then has been poured over humanity, bathing it in the light of knowledge. I speak of the Sun of Righteousness, Christ Incarnate. The Son of God came into the world to save. What necessity could determine the Divine Perfection, Who knows no need, to become man? Nothing, save love. Only love is free and a liberating virtue. Not passion-love, but agape-love, which is compassion-love. *For God so loved the world, that He gave His Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life* (John 3:16).

Thus Jesus became Love Incarnate, tangible love, crucified love. It was so hard for men to believe what they saw — for perfect love stood before them in human form. They wanted to verify its authenticity as if through fire, to contest if love would preserve its identity to the end. Jesus passed the examination to which mankind subjected Him.

Remember friends, His words from the Cross: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do* (Luke 23:34). What greater proof of love could anyone give than this? And if you believe it when you tell your loved one "You will not die," why do you not believe the words of supreme love when it promises you eternal life?

Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death to life (John 5:24).

You believe, and you know that in truth you believe, and I also know, even if what you believe is not very clear,

my friend. Yet to those who make in your young conscience room for the practice of violent doctrines, and to those who incarcerate your soul in the narrow forms of atheism, your faith is a reality which frightens them more than anything else.

Ideas are preserved through their truth. They do not need violence to persevere. An idea which is maintained through force and violence is deeply undermined by the falsehood within it. If materialists do not speak of death, it is because they are afraid of it and they pass over it in silence, just as they pass over all ideas which cannot be falsified.

Why was March 4 passed over in silence one year after the earthquake in 1977? Because death obliges you to think of God, of the life you have led and your moral responsibility. And so they fear your capacity for intuiting metaphysical truth and your spiritual freedom—just as much as they fear death.

I speak to you about death as your single possibility for resurrection. For without resurrection both life and death become nonsense, absurd. The love of God is the guarantee of our resurrection, and the resurrection is the fundamental of our faith in God and in Jesus Christ, His Son. It is the sublime and glorious occasion of a vital affirmation, an invitation to an amnesty of the past, as one French journalist described it during Catholic Easter. It is an invitation to a commitment in the future.

"Let us forgive all things because of the resurrection." Any other attitude means death. He who died, the Same has also risen, and those who saw Him testified to the fact because they sealed it with their own suffering and death. Let us not doubt the truth of their accounts.

In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week...behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow (Matt. 28:1-3).

This is the majestic depiction of the resurrection of the Lord, the One Who broke the bonds of death and brought to man the fearless perspective of the resurrection.

From now on young man, be not afraid of death. For Christ is risen, being the first fruit of the resurrection (I Cor. 15:20).

From the moment you discover this truth, your life has meaning. It will not finish up between four sides of a coffin and stay there—a fact which would make our lives a useless mockery. But passing through death, it issues forth to the glory of the resurrection. Go, young man, and tell this news to all; let the face of the angel of resurrection light shine—for the angel in you, which I uncovered in my first address, has overcome the world in you. Tell those who until now have oppressed your divine soul: "I believe in the resurrection," and you will see them coil in fear, for your faith has overcome them. They will fret and shout to you that this world is your paradise and your instincts are your heaven.

But you should not stop, but go on, shining and pure, giving the light of that resurrection on the first of Sabbaths to all. You, my friend, are the one, unique bearer of your divinization in Jesus Christ, and with yourself you raise up the entire Romanian people to the height of its own resurrection. From death to life; and from earth to heaven!

The Apocalypse of St. John

by Archbishop Averky

CHAPTER THREE

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE CHURCHES OF ASIA MINOR: SARDIS, PHILADELPHIA, AND LAODICEA

To the Church of Sardis

3:1-3 *And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write: These things saith He that hath the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars: I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.*

To the angel of the church of Sardis the Lord commands to write in a tone more reproaching than consoling. This church has only the name of living faith, but in actual fact is spiritually dead. The Lord threatens the Christians of Sardis with sudden misfortune if they do not repent. There are, however, among them a very few who "have not defiled their garments." Those who overcome (the passions) the Lord promises to clothe in white garments, and their names will not be erased from the book of life, but they will be confessed by the Lord before His heavenly Father.

Sardis in antiquity was a large and wealthy city, the capital of the region of Lydia, and now it is the poor Turkish town of Sard. There are few Christians and they do not have their own church. Under Julian the Apostate the spiritual deadness of this city was clearly manifest: It quickly returned to idol-worship, for which the chastisement of God overtook it: it was destroyed to its foundations.*

3:4-5 *Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment.*

By those who "have not defiled their garments" are metaphorically depicted here the defilements of the soul, and therefore those who have not defiled their garments are those whose minds have not participated in the false teachings of heretics, while their lives were not spotted by passions and vices. By "white raiment" is to be understood the wedding garments in which the guests at the wedding banquet of the King's Son will be clothed; in this image the Lord set forth in the parable the future blessedness of the righteous in His Heavenly Kingdom (Matt. 22:11-12). These garments will be like the garments of the Saviour at the time of the Transfiguration which became "white as the light" (Matt. 17:2).

3:5 *And I will not blot out his name out of the book of life.*

The decrees of God concerning the fate of men are symbolically depicted in the image of a book in which the Lord, as the All-knowing and All-righteous Judge, records all the doings of men. This symbolical image is often used in Sacred Scripture (Ps. 68:28, 138:16; Is, 4:3; Dan. 7:10, 12:1; Mal. 3:16; Ex. 32:32-33; Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3; see also Apoc. 13:8, 17:8, 20:12, 15). According to this conception, he who lives worthy of the highest purpose is

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* The image of the Lord's coming unexpectedly like a thief to chastise evildoers is found elsewhere in the Apocalypse (16:15) and is used by the Lord also in the Gospel; see Matt. 24:42-44, and I Thes. 5:2-4. (*Translator.*)

as it were inscribed in the book of life, while he who lives unworthily is as it ere blotted out of this book, thereby being deprived of the right to eternal life. And therefore the promise to the one who overcomes sin, that his name will not be blotted out of the book of life, means the same thing as a promise not to deprive him of the heavenly goods which are prepared in the future life for the righteous.

3:5-6 *But I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*

The promise to "confess his name" is the same thing that the Lord promised during His life on earth to His true followers (Matt. 10:32, Luke 12:8), that is, "I will acknowledge and proclaim him to be my faithful disciple."

To the Church of Philadelphia

3:7-9 *And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth. I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.*

To the angel of the church of Philadelphia the Lord commands to write much that is consoling and praiseworthy. Despite its "little strength" (evidently referring to the fewness of its inhabitants), this church has not renounced the Name of Jesus before the satanic synagogue of its Jewish persecutors. For this the Lord will so arrange that they will come and bow down before her, and in the difficult time of temptation for all the universe she will find defense and safe-keeping in the Lord Himself. Therefore, the aim of the people of Philadelphia is to keep only that which they have, lest anyone take away their crown. The one who over-

comes the Lord promises to make a pillar in the temple and to write upon him the Name of God and the name of the city of God—the New Jerusalem—and the new name of Jesus.

Philadelphia was the second great city of Lydia and was named for its founder, Attalus Philadelphus, king of Pergamos. This city, alone of all the Asia Minor cities, for a long time did not give in to the Turks. It is remarkable that even at the present time Christianity in Philadelphia is in a more flourishing condition than all the other cities of Asia Minor. Here there has been perserved a numerous Christian population, having its own bishop and twenty-five churches. The inhabitants are distinguished by their great hospitality and kindness. The Turks call Philadelphia "Alakh-Sher," that is, "city of God," and this name involuntarily reminds one of the promise of the Lord: "I will write upon him (that overcometh) the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God" (3:12).

The Son of God calls Himself He that has the key of David in the sense of having the highest authority in the house of David, for a key is a symbol of authority. The house of David of the kingdom of David means the same thing as the Kingdom of God, of which it was a prefiguration in the Old Testament (see Is. 22:22). Further, it is said that if the Lord deigns to anyone to open the doors of this kingdom, no one can hinder this, and the contrary likewise. Here also is contained a figurative indication of the firmness of the faith of the Philadelphians which could not be broken by the Judaizing false teachers. The latter will come and bow down before the feet of the Philadelphians, that is, evidently they will acknowledge themselves to be defeated.

3:10-11 *Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man can take thy crown.*

By the "hour of temptation" during which the Lord promises to preserve His faithful Philadelphians, some understand the

terrible persecutions against Christianity on the part of the pagan Roman Emperors who seized "all the world," as the Roman Empire was then called (compare Luke 2:1). Other commentators suppose that by Philadelphia one must understand one of the Christian churches, or all the Christian Church in general in the last times before the end of the world and the Second Coming of Christ. In this latter sense especially understandable is the exhortation "Behold I come quickly. Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." At that time there will be an increased danger of losing faith because of the multitude of temptations, but thereby the reward for faithfulness will be, so to speak, right at hand, and therefore we must be especially vigilant lest out of light-mindedness we lose the possibility of salvation—as, for example, the wife of Lot lost it.*

3:12-13 *Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from My God; and I will write upon him My new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*

The placing of a "pillar" in the Church of Christ which has not been vanquished by the gates of hell (figuratively represented here in the form of a house) indicates that the one who overcomes in temptations belongs to the Church of Christ inviolably; that is, he has a most solid position in the Kingdom of Heaven. The high reward for such a one will also be the writing upon him of a triple name: the name of a child of God, as belonging inseparably to God; the name of a citizen of the new or heavenly Jerusalem; and the name of Christian, as an authentic member of the Body of Christ. The New Jerusalem, beyond any doubt, is the heavenly triumphant Church (Apoc. 21:2, Gal. 4:26) which "cometh down out of heaven"

* In this second interpretation, the "hour of temptation" is virtually synonymous with the "great tribulation" which will come just before the end of the world, when "the days will be shortened" for the sake of the elect and "immediately after the tribulation of those days" the end of everything will come (Matt. 24:21, 22, 29). (*Translator.*)

because the very origin of the Church from the Son of God, Who came down from heaven (John 3:13), is heavenly; it gives to people heavenly gifts and raises them to heaven.

3:14 *And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and the true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.*

To the angel of the church of Laodicea, the seventh and last of the churches, he is commanded to write much by way of accusation. The Lord does not utter about it a single favorable word. He reproaches it for the fact that it is neither hot nor cold, and therefore He threatens to spit it forth from His mouth like lukewarm water which causes nausea. Despite the opinionated self-confidence of the Laodiceans in their moral perfections, the Lord calls them wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked, exhorting them to take care to cover their nakedness and to heal their blindness. At the same time He calls them to repentance, saying that with love He stands at the doors of the heart of everyone who repents and is ready to come to him with His mercies and forgiveness of everything. The one who overcomes his pride and in general his own moral infirmities the Lord promises to place together with Himself on His throne.

Laodicea, now called by the Turks, "Eski-Gissar," that is, "Ancient Fortress," is in Phrygia on the river Likos, near the city of Colossae. In antiquity it was famous for its trade, the fertility of its soil, and its domestic animals. Its population was very numerous and wealthy; of this there are the testimonies of the excavations at which there have been found many precious pieces of sculpture, fragments of luxurious marble decorations, pedestals, baskets, etc. One may suppose that it was its wealth that made it the Laodiceans so lukewarm to the Christian faith, for which the city was subjected to the chastisement of God—its total destruction and desolation by the Turks.

The Lord is called "the beginning of the creation of God" not, of course, in the sense that He is the first creation of God, but in the sense that *all things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made* (John 1:3), and likewise in the sense that He is the cause of the re-creation of fallen man (Gal. 6:15; Col. 3:10, 1:15, 18).

3:15-16 *I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth.*

The cold man, who has not known faith, can more easily believe and become a fervent believer than a cooled-off Christian who has become indifferent to the faith. Even an open sinner is better than a lukewarm pharisee who is satisfied with his moral condition. This is why the Lord Jesus Christ reproached the Pharisees, preferring to them the repentant publicans and harlots. Open and evident sinners can more easily come to an awareness of their own sinfulness and to true repentance than people with a lukewarm conscience who do not acknowledge their moral infirmities.

3:17-18 *Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.*

"Gold tried in the fire, white raiment, and eyesalve," which the Lord advises the Laodiceans to buy from Him, signify respectively: the love and good will of God acquired by repentance; good works, pure and undefiled conduct; and the highest heavenly wisdom which gives spiritual sight.

'If you wish to become rich, I counsel you, with flaming desire and a fervent heart, to acquire from Me, the Enricher, gold cleansed by the fire of temptations. From it you will have in your heart a treasure that cannot be stolen and will be clothed in a most bright garment of virtues, with which you will cover your nakedness of sin" (St. Andrew, ch. 9).

We may suppose that the Laodiceans actually trusted excessively in their wealth, striving to join together the service of God and mammon. Some think that what is referred to here is pastors who are striving to enrich themselves by means of earthly wealth and have become of the opinion that through wealth they are called to lord it over the inheritance of God, overaweing people

through their wealth. The Lord advises such ones to buy from Him, that is, not merely to ask and receive freely, but to buy—that is, to acquire from Christ Himself at the price of labors of repentance, these things: "gold tried in the fire," that is, the authentic grace-given spiritual wealth, which for a pastor consists among other things in a word of instruction mixed with salt; "white raiment," that is, the gift of doing good to one's neighbor; and "eye-salve," or the virtue of non-acquisitiveness, which opens one's eyes to the vanity and emptiness of all the wealth of this corruptible world.*

To the Church of Laodicea

3:19 *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore, and repent.* (See Prov. 3:11-12; Heb. 12:5-8.)

3:20 *Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.*

"Not by compulsion, He says, is My presence: for I knock at the doors of the heart and rejoice with those who open over their salvation. This salvation I consider food and supper, and I eat what they eat, and thus they banish the *famine of hearing the word of the Lord* (Amos 8:11, *Sept.*) and the darkness of errors" (St. Andrew, ch. 9).

* St. Cyprian of Carthage comments on this passage as follows: "You are mistaken, and are deceived, whosoever you are, that think yourself rich in this world. Listen to the voice of your Lord in the Apocalypse, rebuking men of your stamp with righteous reproaches: 'Thou sayest,' says He, 'I am rich, and increased with goods...' You therefore, who are rich and wealthy, buy for yourself of Christ gold tried by fire, that you may be pure gold, with your filth burnt out as if by fire, if you are purged by almsgiving and righteous works. Buy for yourself white raiment, that you who had been naked according to Adam, and were before frightful and unseemly, may be clothed with the white garment of Christ. And you who are a wealthy and rich matron in Christ's Church, anoint your eyes...with Christ's eyesalve, that you may be able to attain to see God, by deserving well of God, both by good works and character" (The Treatises of St. Cyprian: "On Works and Alms," in Eerdmans Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. V, pp. 479-480). (*Translator.*)

3:21-22 *To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*

To him that overcomes is given the promise that he will sit on the throne of God, by which is to be understood the highest dignity of an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven, one who reigns together with Christ Himself, the Conqueror of the devil. (See Matt. 19:28, Luke 22:30).

The Seven Churches as Seven Christian Epochs

There is an opinion that the seven churches signify seven periods in the life of the whole Church of Christ from its foundation to the end of the world:

1) The church of Ephesus signifies the first period: the Apostolic Church which labored and did not faint while fighting with the first heretics, the Nicolaitans, but soon abandoned the good custom of doing good to others—the "communion of goods" ("thy first love").

2) The church of Smyrna signifies the second period, the period of persecutions against the Church, of which there were ten in all.

3) The church of Pergamos signifies the third period, the epoch of the Ecumenical Councils and the battle with the heresies by the sword of the word of God.

4) The church of Thyatira is the fourth period, the period of the blossoming of Christianity among the new peoples of Europe.

5) The church of Sardis is the epoch of humanism and materialism of the 16th to 18th centuries.

6) The church of Philadelphia is the next-to-last period in the life of the Church of Christ, the epoch contemporary to us, when the Church will in fact have "little strength" in contemporary humanity and new persecutions will begin, when patience will be required.

7) The church of Laodicea is the last, most frightful epoch before the end of the world, characterized by indifference to the faith and outward prosperity.*

* Has not this last epoch already begun in our midst in the 1980's? Judging from the indifference of Orthodox Christians who should be burning with faith and enlightening others, the widespread phariseeism and satisfaction with the outward show of Orthodoxy, and the lukewarmness that so easily steals into the hearts of all of us who are not directly under persecution—this epoch has indeed begun. *Translator.*

SCRIPTURE PARALLELS IN CHAPTER THREE

3:3

Matthew 24:42-44 *Watch therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.*

I Thessalonians 5:2-4. *Yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.*

3:5

Matthew 22:11-12. *And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment; and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.*

Psalm 68:28. *Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and let them not be written with the righteous* (Sept.).

Psalm 138:16. *All men shall be written in Thy book* (*Sept.*).

Daniel 12:1. *And at that time Michael the great prince shall stand up, that stands over the children of thy people; and there shall be a time of tribulation, such tribulation as has not been from the time that there was a nation on the earth until that time. At that time thy people shall be delivered, even every one that is written in the book* (*Sept.*).

Malachi 3:16. *And the Lord gave heed, and hearkened, and He wrote a book of remembrance before Him for them that feared the Lord and reverenced His name* (*Sept.*).

Exodus 32:32-33. *(Moses said:) And now if Thou wilt forgive their sin, forgive it; and if not, blot me out of Thy book, which Thou hast written. And the Lord said to Moses, If any one has sinned against Me, I will blot them out of My book* (*Sept.*).

Luke 10:20. *In this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.*

Philippians 4:3. *Help those women which labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellow laborers, whose names are in the book of life.*

3:7-8

Isaiah 22:22. *And I will give him the glory of David; and he shall rule, and there shall be none to speak against him. And I will give him the key of the house of David upon his shoulder; and he shall open, and there shall be none to shut; and he shall shut, and there shall be none to open* (*Sept.*).

3:10

Luke 2:1. *And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.*

Matthew 24:21-22. *For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.*

3:12

John 3:13. *And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.*

Galatians 4:26. *Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.*

3:14

Galatians 6:15. *In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.*

Colossians 3:10. *(Ye have put on the new man, which is renewed in the knowledge after the image of Him that created him.*

Colossians 1:15, 18. *(The Son) Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature....Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.*

3:19

Proverbs 3:11-12. *My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves, He rebukes, and scourges every son whom He receives* (*Sept.*).

Hebrews 12:5-8. *And have ye forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children. My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him. For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But*

if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

3:21

Matthew 19:28. *And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

Luke 22:29-30. *And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me; that ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

Alexis, Elder Zosima's spiritual father

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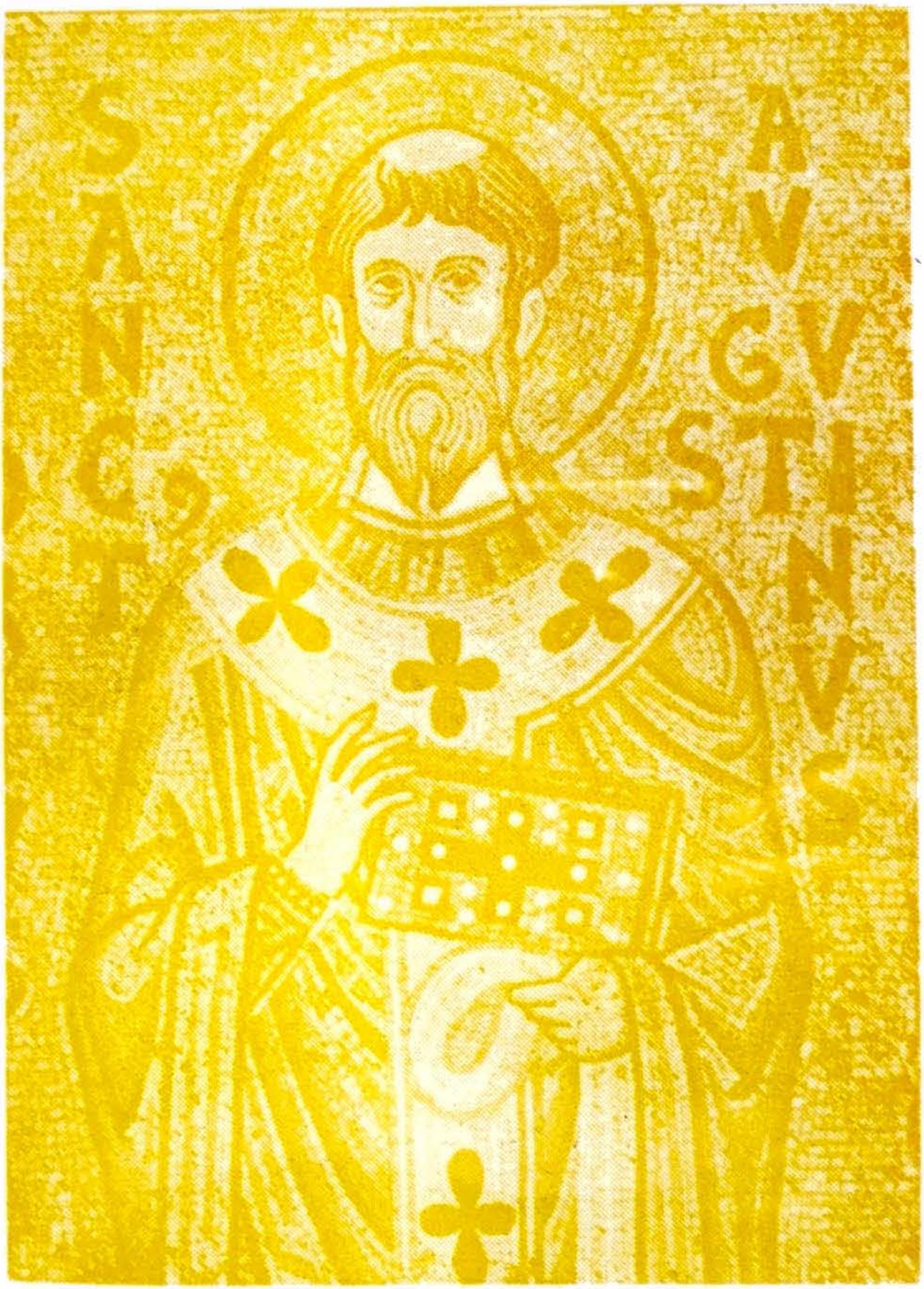

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